



EARLY AMBITIONS

author's childhood and youth are viewed through the refracting medium, of his subsequent experience; and in both the story takes a colour from his mood at the time of writing. When Disraeli wrote *Vivian Grey* his ambition was turned towards the world of action; and when he wrote *Contarini* he was dreaming of winning fame by literary creation. It is the supreme interest of his character that he combined in such high degree the qualities that make for greatness in either sphere, the brooding temperament and glowing imagination of the poet with the practical energy, compelling will, and daring initiative of the man of action; and the two novels reveal as competing tendencies in the youth powers which were harmonised in the complex character of the man. Judiciously interpreted they supplement each other and abound in touches and incidents that help us to complete the picture of these years of adolescence. But it is to *Contarini* that we must look for the most vivid representation of the internal struggles by which Disraeli's youth, no less than his hero's, must have been torn. In *Contarini* ambition awakes at a very early age. While still a child he is consumed - with desire to be 'something great and glorious and dazzling,' and 'entertains a deep conviction that life must be intolerable unless he be the greatest of men.' Yet he hovers perpetually between the two ideals of the life of glorious action on the one hand and the life of contemplation and literary achievement on the other, and hardly even at the end of the novel has he succeeded in finding rest. At one moment he 'longs to wave his inspiring sword at the head of armies or dash into the very heat and blaze of eloquent faction; at another he feels the delight of composition and grows intoxicated with his own eloquence'; he 'begins to ponder over the music of language; he studies the collocation of sweet words and constructs elaborate sentences in lonely walks'; and then again,

losing confidence in his powers, he falls into
' the agony of doubt and despair which is
the doom of youthful genius.' Affected by
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